Fine Arts Initiative
Furman University

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Recommended Citation
University, Furman (2014) "Fine Arts Initiative," Furman Magazine: Vol. 57 : Iss. 1 , Article 25.
Available at: https://scholarexchange.furman.edu/furman-magazine/vol57/iss1/25

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$900,000  
Duke Endowment grant to support sustainable agriculture collaboration on campuses

$250,000  
funds dedicated to faculty development over five years

$7.87 million  
frunds raised for Shi Center initiatives

108  
Student Fellows engaged since 2009

124  
fellowship opportunities provided  
($3,500 per student)

Farming useful information

Throughout 2013, 11 faculty members and 12 students worked collaboratively to understand the far-flung dynamics of the various South Carolina farming regions to help create a more sustainable ecosystem. The resulting research from this project, funded mainly by The Duke Endowment, is intended to be used by policymakers and residents as they make future agricultural decisions.

The Shi Center for Sustainability, known for its cross-disciplinary approach to understanding systems and building solutions, aims to use this project to help people understand the holistic nature of sustainability. The project comprises 14 research projects representing the following disciplines:
- Biology
- Earth and Environmental Sciences
- Shi Center for Sustainability
- Health Sciences
- Business and Accounting

Fine Arts Initiative

New life for a life’s work

It is not every day that a student has the chance to participate in the cataloging and digitizing of a famous artist’s life’s work—to hold and photograph a Trojan helmet worn on the Metropolitan Opera’s stage, to scan sketches for a Broadway set design, or to examine a miniature replica of the ceiling of Symphony Hall in Boston. But thanks to an interdisciplinary partnership and a willing artist, Furman students are doing just that.

Peter Wexler is an acclaimed designer of scenery, costumes, lighting, and performance spaces, as well as a producer and studio artist. He has lent a creative hand to hundreds of productions of every genre since the early 1990s, and his impact stretches from theatre to opera, music, and film. And Furman is taking the lead in transforming the largest representation of his life’s work into The Peter Wexler Digital Museum at Furman University, expected to be accessible by December 2014.

The project officially launched during the first semester of the 2012–13 school year thanks to the generosity of Furman Trustee Todd Ruppert and his wife Karen (parents of Kierstin ’11), who gave the lead gift to fund the project’s efforts. Furman first became acquainted with Wexler when he served as a consultant to the University’s burgeoning Fine Arts Initiative, a multi-faceted project supported by The Duke Endowment to strengthen the fine arts curriculum while also extending Furman’s visual and performing arts presence into the greater Greenville community.

Art Department Chair Ross McClain, M.F.A., quickly saw the potential for collaboration with Wexler when visiting his studio in New York. “I am always working to show the value of majoring in art. I want to teach our students to think differently and be fearless, so this proved to be an incredible opportunity,” McClain said.

With financial support and a partnership with Wexler in place, the challenge became relocation of the collection to Furman—and transporting a life’s work of delicate sculptures, decades-old drawings, and intricately crafted models from bustling New York to Furman’s James B. Duke Library was no easy task.

Once at Furman, the pieces were placed in the care of Rick Jones, manager of the library’s Digital Collections Center. “Wexler is a living master of his craft,” said Jones, who is leading the process of photographing, scanning, and cataloging over 8,000 pieces of Wexler’s work.

Wexler wants the work to be available in the digital age. “I wanted to digitize my work for 10 years and had several offers to assist, but Furman had the focus, energy, intent and real desire,” Wexler said.

Through Furman’s partnership, students had the opportunity to interact with Wexler throughout the year. Jones and the team involved celebrated the digitization and partnership with an exhibition of Wexler’s work in October 2013, funded in part by The Duke Endowment.